

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in St. Louis, Missouri

October 4, 2011

It is good to be back in the Midwest. There is a lot of foolishness going on on the East Coast. [Laughter] So I had to get back to my roots.

It is wonderful to be with all of you. Bob, thanks for everything that you've done, including, by the way, fixing some of the lighting in the White House—[laughter]—which we very much appreciate.

To the Carnahans, thank you for the incredible hospitality. What a wonderful greeting. I have a soft spot for anybody who's got daughters. [Laughter] So—and you guys have your hands full. [Laughter] But they are gorgeous. To all of you who helped to pull this evening together, I'm extraordinarily grateful.

I'm going to be very brief at the top, because I want to spend most of the time just in conversation. We've got a lot of friends here, people who I've known for a long time who have been great supporters for a long time.

We're obviously at a critical junction in our country's history. You guys helped to propel me into office in 2008. We didn't fully understand at that point how deep this crisis was going to be. And we now know that in that final quarter of 2008, when we were still campaigning, that the economy actually shrank by 9 percent. It was the deepest, toughest economic crisis that we've had since the Great Depression.

So we had to go in and move quickly. And we did. And because we moved quickly, by the end of 2010, the economy was growing again. Because we moved quickly, the auto industry was safe. Because we moved quickly and effectively, we were able to stem some of the job loss. And in the meantime, we were able to keep a bunch of promises that we'd talked about during the campaign, whether it was getting our troops from Iraq and making sure that we ended "don't ask, don't tell," to being able to finally pass health care reform and make sure that not only were we bringing down costs over the long term, but also making sure that people who didn't have health insurance could actually have access to coverage.

So I am extraordinarily proud of the track record that we've established over the last 2½ years. But people are still hurting out there, and times are still tough. And it's not just here in the United States, it's global.

The United States, for all our challenges, is still looked upon around the world as somebody who has to help guide this incredible rapid change that's taking place in this 21st-century global economy. But we're not going to be able to lead as effectively as we need to unless we make sure that we get things here at home fixed.

So our immediate task, the thing that's most urgent, in my mind and I'm sure in a lot of other people's minds, is putting people back to work, putting America back to work.

And we've spent the last month talking about this "American Jobs Act": principles, by the way, and proposals that had historically been supported by Democrats and Republicans. I don't know when Republicans decided they don't believe in building roads and bridges. [Laughter] I don't know when they decided they don't like tax cuts for small businesses. I don't know when

they decided that it didn't make sense for us to put teachers back in the classroom. And I'm hoping that when they reflect upon it a little bit, they'll realize that these are all proposals they've supported in the past.

And we've also put forward a way to pay for it that not only puts Americans back to work, helps avert a potential—another dip in our—[inaudible]—but also brings down our deficit and debt in a sustainable way. And it's paid for by combining tough cuts—some of which I wouldn't be making if we weren't in such a tough fiscal situation—with making sure that people like us in this room, who have been incredibly blessed, pay a little bit more and do our fair share, which is basically the formula for deficit reduction that every single expert out there who's looked at it says is the right way to go.

So that's our immediate task. The election is 13 months away; the American people can't wait for the next 13 months. They need help right now. And I'm going to urge everybody who's here to help us in mounting this campaign to make sure Congress acts. And I know you guys have a little pull, at least with one Congressman. [Laughter]

But beyond that, this election is actually going to be even more fundamental, because it represents a stark, contrasting vision of where we want to take the country. Do we want a country that has the best education system in the world? Then we're going to have to reform it, but we're also going to have to invest in it. Do we want to make sure that we have the best infrastructure in the world that helped to make us an economic superpower? That means roads and bridges, ports and dams and locks. But it also means making sure that we've got the best broadband and wireless in the world. It also means high-speed rail. It also means having a new-generation aviation system that can help airlines save on fuel and help move products and services more quickly around the country. Or do we just say we're going to try to live off the investments that were made a generation ago or two generations ago or three generations ago, that we've stopped thinking big about what we can do as a country?

Are we going to continue to make investments in science and technology and basic medical research? Or are we going to starve that thing that's been most vital to our technological ascendancy? Are we going to continue to have a safety net that is real for the poor and the vulnerable, but also for middle class families all across the country: a retirement system that works, Social Security that's solvent, a Medicare system that provides care for our seniors?

Internationally, are we going to lead not just with our military, but are we also going to lead with our diplomacy and our vision and the power of our example? Are we—do we think that the only way to compete is to strip away regulations that keep our air and water clean, that make sure that our workers have safe work environments? Or do we think that those are things that we owe to our children and our grandchildren?

So these are fundamental choices that we're going to be making, and they'll be shaped by who gets appointed to the Supreme Court. They'll be shaped by what kind of legislation emerges from Congress. It's going to be shaped by how our national conversation goes about the way forward.

Now, I'm confident that we are going to be able to win that debate, but I can only win it with all of you. Two thousand eight was sort of this weird convergence of everything happening in a way that was exciting and hopeful. This one, this election, is going to be much more just grinding it out. We're going to have to work really hard. I'm a little grayer. We've been around the block a few times. And the American people are tired, and they just want things to go ahead and get better.

So, in that kind of environment, we're going to have to provide even more effort than we did in 2008. I hope you guys are ready for it, because if you are, then we're going to win. And I don't think we have a choice. I think it's that important that we make sure that America is on a trajectory where middle class families in this country can continue to believe in the American Dream and they can continue to believe that if they work hard they are rewarded and that being responsible is rewarded and that regardless of their circumstances, they can see a path to a better life.

That's been the essence of America. I don't want that to go away. We've got to fight for it. And I hope you're willing to join me.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:35 p.m. at the residence of Thomas S. and Lisa Carnahan. In his remarks, he referred to Robert G. Clark, chairman and chief executive officer, Clayco Inc.; and Rep. J. Russell Carnahan.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraisers :: St. Louis, MO.

Locations: St. Louis, MO.

Names: Carnahan, J. Russell; Carnahan, Lisa; Carnahan, Thomas S.; Clark, Robert G.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Aviation : Air traffic control system, modernization; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Improvement; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Unrest; Communications : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Education : Standards and school accountability; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Missouri : Democratic Party event; Missouri : President's visit; Science and technology : Research and development; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD201100723.